LITTLE BLUE BOOK NO. 945
Edited by E. Haldeman-Julius

Tales of Oriental Life

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TALES OF ORIENTAL LIFE

THE QUEST OF THE GOLDEN FLEECE

SIR HUGH CLIFFORD

All the wintry afternoon we had been worming our way down the Thames, the big steamer filtering slowly through the throng of crafts like a bus moving ponderously amid crowded traffic. When at last we won free of the river, the Channel chop took us on its knee and rocked us roughly, while the skud of wind and rain slapped us in the face with riotous horseplay. As we came up from dinner and struggled aft, our feet slipped and slithered over the wet decks, and the shouts of the frozen Lascars at the lookout reached us through the sopping gloom, despairing as the howls of souls in torment. The ugly, hopeless melancholy of our surroundings accorded well with the mood which possessed the majority of those on board; for we were outward bound, and men who leave England for the good of their purses carry heavy hearts with them at the start. In the smoking room, therefore, with coat collars tugged up about our ears and hands thrust deeply into our pockets, we sat smoking with mournful earnestness, glaring at our neighbors with the open animosity of the genial Briton.

Through the thickening fog of the tobacco smoke, the figure of a man seated immediately opposite to me was dimly visible; but presently his unusual appearance claimed my closer attention and aroused my curiosity. His emaci-

ated body was wrapped in a huge ulster, from the up-turned collar of which a head emerged that I can only describe as being like nothing so much as that of a death's-head moth. He was clean-shaven, and his cheeks were as hollow as saucers; his temples were pinched and prominent; from the bottom of deeply sunken sockets little wild eyes glared like savage things held fast in a gin. The mouth was set hard, as though its owner were enduring agony, and trying his best to repress a scream. As much of his hair as his cap and his coat collar suffered to be seen was of a dirty yellow-white; yet in some indefinable way the man did not give the impression of being old. Rather he seemed to be one prematurely broken; one who suffered acutely and unceasingly; one who, with rigid self-control, maintained a tight grip upon himself, as though all his nerves were on edge. I had marked a somewhat similar expression of concentrated determination upon the faces of fellow passengers engaged in fighting the demon of sea-sickness; but this man sucked at his pipe, and obviously drew a measure of comfort from it, in a fashion which showed that he was indifferent to the choppy motion. Yet though those buried eyes of his were glaring and savage—eyes that seemed to be eternally seeking some means of escape from a haunting peril—they were not restless, but rather were fixed in a venomous scowl; while the man himself, dead quiet, save for the light that glinted from them, was apparently sunken in a fathomless abstraction.

All this I noted mechanically, but it was the extraordinary condition of his face that chiefly excited my wonder. It was literally pock-marked with little purple cicatrices, small oblong lumps, smooth and shining feebly in the lamplight, that rose above the surface of the skin, and ran this way and that at every imaginable angle. I had seen more than once the faces of German duellists wonderfully and fearfully beslashed; but the scars they wore were long and clean, wholly unlike the badly healed lumps which disfigured my queer *vis-à-vis*. I fell to speculating as to what could have caused such a multiplicity of wounds: not a gunpowder explosion, certainly, for the skin showed none of the blue tattooing inseparable from injuries so inflicted; nor yet the bursting of a gun, for that always makes at least one jagged cut, not innumerable tiny scars such as those at which I was looking. I could think of no solution that would fit the case; and as I watched, suddenly the man withdrew his hands from his pockets, waggling them before his face with a nervous motion as though he were warding off some invisible assailants. Then I saw that every inch of the backs and palms, and as much of his wrists as were exposed to view, were pitted with cicatrices similar to those with which his face was bedecked.

"Evening, you folk!" said a nasal voice in the doorway, breaking discordantly upon the sulky silence which brooded over us; and I looked up to see the figure of a typical "down-easter," slim and alert, standing just within

the room. He had a keen, hard face on him, like a meat-axe, and the wet rain stood upon it in drops. He jerked his head at us in collective greeting, walked through the haze of smoke with a free gait and swinging shoulders, and threw himself down in a heap on the horsehair bench beside the man whose strange appearance had riveted my attention. Seated thus, he looked around at us with quick, humorous glances, as though our British solemnity, which made each one of us grimly isolated in a crowd, struck him as at once amusing and impossible of endurance.

"Snakes!" he exclaimed genially. "This is *mighty* cheerful!" His strident twang seemed to cut wedges out of the foggy silence. "We look as though we had swallowed a peck of tenpenny nails, and the blamed things were sitting heavy on our stomachs. Come, let us be friendly. I ain't doing any trade in sore-headed bears. Wake up, sonny." And he dug his melancholy neighbor in the ribs with an aggressive and outrageous thumb.

It was for all the world as though he had touched the spring that sets in motion the clockwork of a mechanical toy. The man's cap flew from his head—disclosing a scalp ill-covered with sparse hairs and scarred like his face—as he leaped to his feet with a scream, torn suddenly, as it were, from the depths of his self-absorbed abstraction. Casting quick, nervous glances over his shoulder, he backed into the nearest corner, his hands clawing at the air, his eyes hunted, defiant, yet abject. His whole figure was instinct with terror—

terror seeking impotently to defend itself against unnumbered enemies. His teeth were set, his gums drawn back over them in two rigid white lines; a sort of snarling cry broke from him—a cry that seemed to be the expression of furious rage, pain, and agonizingly concentrated effort.

It all took place in a fraction of a second—as quickly as a man jumps when badly startled—and as quickly he recovered his balance, and pulled himself together. Then he cast a murderous glance at the American—who at that moment presented a picture of petrified astonishment—let fly a venomous oath at him, and slammed out of the room in a towering rage.

"Goramercy!" ejaculated the American limply. "I want a drink. Who'll join me?" But no one responded to his invitation.

That was the occasion of my first meeting with Timothy O'Hara: but as I subsequently traveled half across the world in his company, was admitted to his friendship, and heard him relate his experiences, not once but many times, I am able to supply the key to his extraordinary behavior that evening. I regret that it is impossible to give his story in his own words, for he told it graphically, and with force; but unfortunately his very proper indignation got the better of his discretion, with the result that he frequently waxed blasphemous in the course of his narrative, and at times was rendered altogether inarticulate by rage. However, the version which I now offer to the reader is accurate in all essential details: and my own first-hand knowledge of that gentle

race called Muruts, at whose hands O'Hara fared so evilly, has helped me to fill in such blanks as may have existed in the tale as it originally reached me.

A score of years ago there was a man in North Borneo, whose name does not matter—a man who had the itch of travel in him, and loved untrodden places for their own sake. He undertook to explore the interior of the no man's land which the Chartered Company euphemistically described as its "property." He made his way inland from the western coast, and little more was heard of him for several months. At the end of that time a haze of disquieting rumors, as impalpable as the used-up, fever-laden wind that blows eternally from the interior, reached the little, squalid stations on the sea shore; and shortly afterward the body of the explorer, terribly mangled and mutilated, was sluiced down-country by a freshet, and brought up on a sand spit near the mouth of a river on the east coast. Here it was discovered by a couple of white men, who with the aid of a handful of unwilling natives buried it in becoming state, since it was the only thing with a European father and mother which had ever traveled across the center of North Borneo, from sea to sea, since the beginning of time.

In life the explorer had been noted for his beard, a great yellow cascade of hair which fell down his breast from his lip to his waist; and when his corpse was found this ornament was missing. The Chartered Company, whose business it was to pay dividends in adverse cir-

cumstances, did not profess to be a philanthropical institution, and could not spend its hard-squeezed revenues upon putting the fear of death into people who have made too free with the lives of white folk, as is the practice in other parts of Asia. Therefore no steps were taken by the local administration to punish the Muruts of the interior who had amused themselves by putting the explorer to an ugly death; but the knowledge that the murdered man's beard had been shorn from his chin by some truculent savage, and was even then ornamenting the knife handle of a Murut chief in the heart of the island rankled in the minds of the white men on the spot. The wise and prudent members of the community talked a great deal, said roundly that the thing was a shame and an abomination, and took care to let their discretion carry them no farther than the spoken word. The young and foolish did not say much, but the recovery of that wisp of hair became to many of them a tremendous ambition, a dream, something that made even existence in North Borneo tolerable, while it presented itself to their imaginations as a feat possible of accomplishment. With a few this dream became an *idée fixe*, an object in a life that otherwise was unendurable; and it may even have saved a few from the perpetration of more immediate follies. The quest would be the most hazardous conceivable, a fitting enterprise for men rendered desperate by the circumstances into the midst of which fate had thrust them.

Sitting at home in England, with pleasant

things to distract the mind all about you, and with nothing at hand more dangerous than a taxicab, all this pother concerning the hairs of a dead man's chin may appeal to you as something absurdly sentimental and irrational; but try for the moment to place yourself in the position of an isolated white man at an outstation of North Borneo. Picture to yourself a tumble-down thatched bungalow standing on a roughly cleared hill, with four Chinese shops and a dilapidated police station squatting on the bank of a black, creeping river. Rub in a smudge of blue-green forest, shutting you up on flanks, front, and rear. Fill that forest with scattered huts, wherein squalid natives live the lives of beasts—natives whose language you do not know, whose ideas you do not understand, who make their presence felt only by means of savage howls raised by them in their drunken orgies—natives whose hatred of you can only be kept from active expression by such fear as your armed readiness may inspire. Add to this merciless heat, faint, exhausted air, an occasional bout of the black fever of the country, and not enough of work to preserve your mind from rust. Remember that the men who are doomed to live in these places get no sport, have no recreations, no companionship; and that the long, empty, suffocating days trail by, one by one, bringing no hope of change, and that the only communication with the outer world is kept up fitfully by certain dingy steam traps which are always behind time, and which may, or may not, arrive once a month. Can you wonder that amid

such surroundings men wax melancholy; that they take to brooding over all manner of trivial things in a fashion which is not quite sane; and that the knowledge that their continued existence is dependent upon the wholesome awe in which white folks are held sometimes gets upon their nerves, and makes them feverishly anxious to vindicate the honor of their race? When you have let the full meaning of these things sink into your minds, you will begin to understand why so much excitement prevailed in North Borneo concerning the reported ownership of the deceased explorer's beard.

Timothy O'Hara and Harold Bateman had lived lives such as those which I have described for half a dozen years or more. They had had ample leisure in which to turn the matter of the explorer's beard over and over in their minds, till the thought of it had bred something like fanaticism—a kind of still, white-hot rage within them. It chanced that their leave of absence fell due upon one and the same day. It followed that they put their heads together and decided to start upon a private raid of their own into the interior of the Murut country, with a view to redeeming the trophy. It also followed that they made their preparations with the utmost secrecy, and that they enlisted a dozen villainous little Dyaks from Sarawak to act as their punitive force. The whole thing was highly improper and very illegal, but it promised adventurous experiences, and both Bateman and O'Hara were young and not overwise. Also, it must be urged in extenuation of

their conduct that they had the effects of some six years' crushing monotony to work off; and that they had learned to regard the Muruts of the interior as their natural enemies; and that the ugliness and the deadly solitude of their existence had rendered them savage, just as the tamest beast becomes wild and ferocious when it finds itself held in the painful grip of a trap.

I am in nowise concerned to justify their doings: my part is to record them. O'Hara and Bateman vanished one day from the last outpost of quasi-civilization, having given out that they were off up-country in search of big game —which was a fact. Their little expedition slipped into the forest, and the wilderness swallowed it up. When once they had pushed out into the unknown interior they were gone past power to recall, were lost as completely as a needle in a ten-acre hay-field; and they breathed more freely because they had escaped from the narrow zone wherein the law of the white man runs, and need guide themselves for the future merely by the dictates of their own rudimentary notions of right and wrong.

They had a very hard time of it, so far as I can gather; for the current of the rivers, which crept toward them, black and oily, from the upper country, was dead against them, and the rapids soon caused them to abandon their boats. Then they tramped it, trudging with dogged perseverance up and down the hills, clambering painfully up sheer ascents, slipping down the steep pitches on the other side, splashing and laboring through the swamps betwixt

hill and hill, or wading waist-deep across wildernesses of rank *lalang-grass*, from the green surface of which the refracted heat smote them under their hat brims with the force of blows. Aching in every limb, half-blinded by the sweat that trickled into their eyes, flayed by the sun, mired to the ears in the morasses, torn by thorn thickets, devoured by tree leeches, stung by all manner of jungle insects, and oppressed by the weight of self-imposed effort that pride forbade them to abandon, they struggled forward persistently, fiercely, growing more savage and more vindictive at every painful step. The golden fleece of beard, which was the object of their quest, became an oriflamme, in the wake of which they floundered eternally through the inferno of an endless fight. Their determination to recover it became a madness, a possession: it filled their minds to the exclusion of aught else, nerved them to fresh endeavor, spurred them out of their weariness, and would not suffer them to rest. But the bitterness of their travail incensed them mightily against the Murut folk, whose lack of reverence for white men had imposed so tremendous a task upon these self-appointed champions of their race; and as they sat over their unpalatable meals when the day's toil was ended, they talked together in bloodthirsty fashion of the vengeances they would wreak and the punishment they would exact from the tribe which was discovered to be in possession of the object of their search.

One feature of their march was that prudence forbade a halt. The Murut of North Borneo

is a person of mean understanding, who requires time wherein to set his slow intellect in motion. He is a dipsomaniac, a homicide by training and predilection, and he has a passion for collecting other people's skulls, which is as unscrupulous and as fanatical as that of the modern philatelist. Whenever he encounters a stranger, he immediately falls to coveting that stranger's skull; but as he is a creature of poor courage it is essential to his comfort that he should win possession of it only by means that will not endanger his own skin. The question as to how such means may be contrived presents a difficult problem for his solution, and it takes his groping mind from two to three days in which to hit upon a workable plan. The explorer, as Bateman and O'Hara were aware, had lost his life because, overcome by fatigue, he had allowed himself to commit the mistake of spending more than a single night under a hospitable Murut roof-tree, and had so given time to his hosts to plot his destruction. Had he only held steadily upon his way, all might have been well with him: for in a country where every village is at enmity with its neighbors, a short march would have carried him into a stranger's land, which he should have been able to quit in its turn ere the schemes for his immolation hatched therein had had time in which to ripen. O'Hara and Bateman, therefore, no matter how worn out they might be by that everlasting, clambering tramp across that cruel huddle of hill-caps, were rowelled by necessity

into pushing forward, and still forward, as surely as the day dawned.

Often the filth and squalor of the long airless huts—each one of which accommodated a whole village community in its dark interior, all the pigs and fowls of the place beneath its flooring, and as many blackened human squlls as could find hanging space along its roof-beams—sickened them, and drove them forth to camp in the jungle. Here there were only wild beasts—self-respecting and on the whole cleanly beasts, which compared very favorably with the less attractive animals in the village huts—but a vigilant guard had to be maintained against possible surprise; and this, after a heart-breaking tramp, was hard alike upon white men and Dyaks.

The raiders had pitched their camp in such a place one evening; and as the party lacked meat, and the pigeons could be heard cooing in the treetops close at hand, O'Hara took his fowling piece and strolled off alone into the forest, with the intention of shooting a few birds for the pot. The jungle was very dense in this part of the country—so dense, indeed, that a man was powerless to see in any direction for a distance of more than a dozen yards; but the pigeons were plentiful, and as they fluttered from tree to tree O'Hara walked after them without in the least realizing how far he was straying from his starting point. At last the fast-failing light arrested his attention, and as he stooped to pick up the last pigeon, the search for which among the brambles had occupied more time than he had fancied, it

suddenly struck him that he ought to be returning to the camp, while a doubt as to its exact direction assailed him. He was in the very act of straightening himself again with a view to looking about him for some indication of the path by which he had come when a slight crackle in the underwood smote upon his ear. He remained very still, stooping forward as he was, holding his breath, and listening intently. It flashed through his mind that the sound might have been made by one of the Dyaks, who perhaps had come out of the camp in search of him, and he waited the repetition of the snapping noise with eagerness, hoping that it would tell him whether it were caused my man or beast. As he stood thus for an instant with bowed shoulders, the crackle came again, louder, crisper, and much clearer than before; and at the same moment, before he had time to change his attitude or to realize that danger threatened him, something smote him heavily in the back, bringing him prone to the earth with a grunt. The concussion was caused by some yielding substance, that was yet quick and warm; and the litter of dead leaves and the tangle of underwood combined to break his fall. He was not hurt, therefore, though the breath was knocked out of him, and that unseen something, which tumbled and writhed upon his back, pinned him to the ground. He skewed his head around, trying to see what had assailed him, and immediately a diabolical face peeped over his shoulder an inch or two above it. He only saw, as it were, in a flash; but the sight was one which, he

was accustomed to say, he would never forget. In after years it was wont to recur to him in dreams, and as surely as it came it woke him with a scream. It was a savage face, brown yet pallid, grimed with dirt and wood ashes, with a narrow, retreating forehead, a bestial, prognathous snout, and a tiny, twitching chin. The little, black eyes, fierce and excited, were ringed about with angry sores, for the eyelashes had been plucked out. The eyebrows had been removed, but from the upper lip a few coarse wires sprouted uncleanly. The face was split in twain by a set of uneven teeth pointed like those of a wildcat, and tightly clenched, while above and below them the gums snarled rigidly, bearing witness to the physical effort which their owner was making. The scalp was divided into even halves by a broad parting, on either side of which there rose a tangle of dirty, unkempt hair, that was drawn back into a chignon, giving to the creature a curious, sexless aspect. All these things O'Hara noted in the fraction of a second; and as the horror bred of them set him heaving and fighting as well as his cramped position made possible, a sharp knee-cap was driven into the back of his neck, and his head fell with a concussion that blinded him. For a moment he lay still and inert, and in that moment he was conscious of little, deft hands, that flew this way and that, over, under, and around his limbs and of the pressure of narrow withes, drawn suddenly taut, that ate into his flesh. Up to this time the whole affair had been transacted in a dead, unnatural silence that somehow gave

to it the strangeness and unreality of a nightmare; but now, as O'Hara lay prostrate with his face buried in the underwood, the even song of the forest insects, which rings through the jungle during the gloaming hour, was suddenly interrupted by an outbreak of queer sounds—by gurgling, jerky speech intermixed with shrill squealings and whistlings, and by the clicking cackle which stands the Murut folk instead of laughter. Yet even now the voices of his captors were subdued and hushed, as though unwilling to be overheard; and O'Hara, understanding that the Muruts feared to be interrupted by their victim's friends, made shift to raise a shout, albeit the green stuff forced its way into his mouth and choked his utterance.

Immediately the little nimble hands were busy, clutching him afresh, while the tones of those inhuman voices shrilled and gurgled and clicked more excitedly than before. O'Hara was heaved and tugged, first one way, then another, until his body was rolled over on to its back, falling with a dull bump. He shouted once more, putting all the strength that was in him into the yell, and the nearest Murut promptly stamped on his mouth with his horny heel. O'Hara bit viciously at the thing, but his teeth could make no impression upon its leathery under-surface, and before he could shout again he found himself gagged with a piece of wood, which was bound in its place by a couple of withes. Despair seized him then, and for a moment or two he lay still, with the manhood knocked fairly out of him by a crushing consciousness of impotence, while the gabble of

squeak and whistle and grunt, still hushed cautiously, broke out more discordantly than ever.

The withes about his limbs bound O'Hara so cripplingly that only his neck was free to move; but presently, craning it upward, he caught sight of his persecutors for the first time. They formed a squalid group of little, half-starved, wizened creatures, not much larger than most European children of fourteen, but with brutal faces that seemed to bear the weight of whole centuries of care and animal indulgence. They were naked, save for their foul loin-clouts; they were abominably dirty, and their skins were smothered in leprous-looking ringworm; they had not an eyelash or an eyebrow among them, for the hairs had been plucked out by the root; but their scalps were covered by frowsy growths, gathered into loathsome chignons on the napes of their necks. Every man was armed with one or more spears, and from the waist of each a long knife depended, sheathed in a wooden scabbard hung with tufts of hair. One of them—the man of whose face O'Hara had caught a glimpse above his shoulder—flourished his sheathed knife insistently in his captive's face with grotesque gesticulations, and O'Hara shuddered every time that the disgusting tassels that bedecked the scabbard swept his cheek. The fading daylight was very dim now, enabling O'Hara to see only the *form* of the things by which he was surrounded; *color* had ceased to have any meaning in those gloomy forest aisles. The grinning savage prancing and gibbering around him,

and brandishing that sheathed weapon with its revolting trophies, puzzled him. If he meant murder, why did he not draw his blade? In the depth of his misery the inconsequence of this war-dance furnished O'Hara with an additional torture.

Presently two of the Muruts came suddenly within his field of vision bearing a long green pole. This they proceeded to thrust between O'Hara's flesh and the withes that were entwined about him; and when this had been accomplished, the whole party set their shoulders under the extremities of the pole and lifted their prisoner clear of the ground. Then they bore him off at a sort of jog-trot.

The thongs, tightened fearfully by the pressure thus put upon them, pinched and bruised him pitilessly; and his head, lacking all support, hung down in an attitude of dislocation, waggling this way and that at every jolt; the blood surged into his brain, causing a horrible vertigo, and seeming to thrust his eyes almost out of their sockets; he thought that he could *feel* his limbs swelling above the biting grip of the withes, and an irresistible nausea seized him. Maddening cramps tied knots in his every muscle; and had his journey been of long duration, Timothy O'Hara would never have reached its end alive. Very soon, however, the decreased pace, and the shrill whistling sounds which came from the noses of his Murut bearers, told him that the party was ascending a hill—for these strange folk do not pant like ordinary human beings, and the uncanny noise was familiar to O'Hara from many

a toilsome march in the company of native porters. Presently, too, between the straining legs of the leading files, O'Hara caught a flying glimpse of distant fire; and that, he knew, betokened the neighborhood of a village.

A few minutes later, just as he thought that he was about to lose consciousness, the village was reached—a long, narrow hut, raised on piles, and with a door at either end, from the thresholds of which crazy ladder-ways led to the ground. Up the nearest of these rude staircases the Muruts struggled with their burden, banging his head roughly against each untrimmed rung, and throwing him down on the bamboo flooring with a chorus of grunts. For a moment there was silence, while the entire community gathered round the white man, staring at him eagerly with a kind of ferocious curiosity. Then with one accord all the men, women, and children present set up a diabolical chorus of whoopings and yellings. They seemed to give themselves over to a veritable insanity of noise. Some, squatting on their heels, supporting the weight of their bodies on arms thrust well behind them, tilted their chins to the roof and howled like maniacs. Others, standing erect, opened their mouths to their fullest extent, and emitted a series of shrill blood-curdling bellows. Others, again, shut their eyes, threw their arms aloft, and, concentrating every available atom of energy in the effort, screamed till their voices broke. The ear-piercing din sounded as though all the devils in hell had of a sudden broken loose. Heard from afar, the savage triumph, the dia-

bolical delight that found in it their fitting expression, might well have made the blood run cold in the veins of the bravest; but heard close at hand by the solitary white man whose capture had evoked that hideous outcry, and who knew himself to be utterly at the mercy of these fiends, it was almost enough to unship his reason. O'Hara told me that from that moment he forgot the pains which his bonds had occasioned him, forgot even his desire to escape, and was filled with a tremendous longing to be put out of his agony—to be set free by death from this unspeakable inferno. His mind, he said, was working with surprising activity, and "as though it belonged to somebody else." In a series of flashes he began to recall all that he had ever heard of the manners and customs of the Muruts, of the strange uses to which they put their prisoners; and all the while he was possessed by a kind of restlessness that made him eager for them to do *something*—of no matter how awful a character—that would put a period to his unendurable suspense.

Meanwhile the Muruts were enjoying themselves thoroughly. Great earthenware jars, each sufficiently large to drown a baby with comfort, were already standing round the enclosed veranda which formed the common-room of the village, on to which each family cubicle opened, and to these jars the Muruts—men, women, and children — repeatedly addressed themselves, squatting by them, and sucking up, through long bamboo tubes, the abominable liquor which filled them. Each toper, as

he quitted the jar, fell to howling with redoubled energy; and as more and more of the fiery stuff was consumed, their cries became more savage, more inarticulate, and more diabolical.

Half a dozen men, however, were apparently busy in the performance of some task on a spot just behind O'Hara's head, for though they frequently paid visits of ceremony to the liquor-jars, they always staggered back to the same part of the room when their draughts were ended, and there fell to hacking and hammering at wood with renewed energy. O'Hara was convinced that they were employed in constructing some infernal instrument of torture; and the impossibility of ascertaining its nature was maddening, and set his imagination picturing every abominable contrivance for the infliction of anguish of which he had ever heard or read. And all the while the hideous orgies, for which his capture was the pretext, were waxing fast and furious.

Suddenly the hidden group behind him set up a shrill cat-call, and at the sound every Murut in sight leaped to his or her feet, and danced frantically with hideous outcry and maniacal laughter. A moment later a rattan rope whined as it was pulled over the main beam of the roof with something heavy at its end; and as the slack of the cord was made fast to the wall-post opposite to him, O'Hara was aware of some large object suspended in mid-air, swinging out into the middle of the veranda immediately above him. This, as he craned his neck up at it, struggling to see it

more clearly in the uncertain torch-light, was presently revealed as a big cage, an uneven square in shape, the bars of which were some six inches apart, saving on one side, where a wide gap was left. He had barely had time to make this discovery when a mob of Murut men and women rushed at him, cut the bonds that bound him, and mauling him mercilessly, lifted him up, and literally threw him into the opening formed by the gap. The cage rocked crazily, while the Muruts yelled their delight, and two of their number proceeded hastily to patch up the gap with cross-pieces of wood. Then the whole crowd drew away a little, though the hubbub never slackened, and O'Hara set his teeth to smother the groans which the pains of the removed bonds nearly wrung from him. For the time fear was forgotten in the acuteness of the agony which he endured; for as the blood began to flow freely once more, every inch of his body seemed to have been transformed into so many raging teeth. His extremities felt soft and flabby—cold, too, like jellies—but O'Hara was by nature a very strong man and at the time of his capture had been in the pink of condition. In an incredibly short while, therefore, the pain subsided, and he began to regain the use of his cramped limbs.

He was first made aware of his recovered activity by the alacrity with which he bounded into the center of the cage in obedience to a sharp prick in the back. He tried to rise to his feet, and his head came into stunning contact with the roof; then, in a crouching atti-

tude, he turned in the direction whence the attack had reached him. What he saw filled him with horror. The leader of the Muruts who had captured him, his eyes bloodshot with drink, was staggering about in front of him with grotesque posturings, waving his knife in one hand and its wooden sheath in the other. It was the former, evidently, that had administered that painful prod to O'Hara's back, but it was the latter which chained the white man's attention even in that moment of whirling emotions, for from its base depended a long shaggy wisp of sodden yellow hair—the golden fleece of which O'Hara and Bateman were in search. In a flash the savage saw that his victim had recognized the trophy to which he had already been at some pains to direct to his attention, and the assembled Muruts gave unmistakable tokens that they all grasped the picturesqueness of the situation. They yelled and howled and bayed more frantically than ever; some of them rolled upon the floor, their limbs and faces contorted by paroxysms of savage merriment, while others staggered about, smiting their fellows on their bare shoulders, squeaking like bats, and clicking like demoralized clockwork. A second prod with a sharp point made O'Hara shy across his narrow cage like a flybitten horse, and before he could recover his balance a score of delicately handled weapons inflicted light wounds all over his face and hands. As each knife touched him its owner put up his head and repeated some formula in a shrill sing-song, no word of which was intelligible to O'Hara save only the name of Kina-

Balu—the great mountain which dominates North Borneo, and is believed by the natives to be the eternal resting-place of the spirits which have quitted the life of earth.

Then, for the first time, O'Hara understocd what was happening to him. He had often heard of the ceremony known to the wild Muruts as a *bangun*, which has for its object the maintenance of communication between the living and the dead. He had even seen a pig hung up, as he was now hanging, while the tamer Muruts prodded it to death very carefully and slowly, charging it the while with messages for the spirits of the departed; and he remembered how the abominable cruelty of the proceeding had turned him sick, and had set him longing to interfere with native religious customs in defiance of the prudent government which he served. Now he was himself to be done to death by inches, just as the pig had died, and he knew that men had spoken truly when they had explained to him that the unfortunate quadruped was only substituted for a nobler victim as a concession to European prejudice, to the great discontent of the tame Muruts.

These thoughts rushed through his mind with the speed of lightning, and all the while it seemed to him that every particle of his mental forces was concentrated upon a single object —the task of defending himself against a crowd of persecutors. Crouching in the center of the cage, snarling like a cat, with his eyes bursting from their sockets, his every limb braced for a leap in any direction, his hands

scrabbling at the air to ward off the stabs, he faced from side to side, his breath coming in quick, noisy pants. Every second one or another of the points that assailed him made him turn about with a cry of rage, and immediately his exposed back was prodded by every Murut within reach. Suddenly he heard his own voice raised in awful curses and blasphemies, and the familiar tones of his mother-tongue smote him with surprise. He had little consciousness of pain as pain, only the necessity of warding off the points of his enemies' weapons presented itself to him as something that must be accomplished at all costs, and each separate failure enraged him. He bounded about his cage with an energy and an agility that astonished him, and the rocking of his prison seemed to keep time with the lilting of his thumping heart-beats. More than once he fell, and his face and scalp were prodded terribly ere he could regain his feet; often he warded off a thrust with his bare hands. But of the wounds which he thus received he was hardly conscious; his mind was in a species of delirium of rage, and all the time he was torn with a fury of indignation because he, a white man, was being treated in this dishonoring fashion by a pack of despicable Muruts. But he received no serious injury; for the Muruts, who had many messages for their dead relations, were anxious to keep the life in him as long as might be, and in spite of their intoxication, prodded him with shrewdness and caution. How long it all lasted O'Hara never knew with certainty; but it was the exhaustion

caused by loss of breath and blood, and by the wild leaping of that bursting heart of his, that caused him presently to sink on the floor of his cage in a swoon.

The Muruts, finding that he did not answer to their stabs, drew off and gathered eagerly around the liquor-jars. The killing would come soon after dawn—as soon, in fact, as their overnight orgies made it possible—when the prisoner would be set to run the gauntlet, and would be hacked to pieces after one final delicious *bangun*. It was essential, therefore, that enough strength should be left in him to show good sport; and in the meantime their villainous home-made spirits would bring that measure of happiness which comes to the Murut from being suffered, for a little space, to forget the fact of his own repulsive existence. Accordingly, with noisy hospitality, each man tried to make his neighbor drink to greater excess than himself, and all proved willing victims. With hoots and squeals of laughter, little children were torn from their mothers' breasts and given to suck at the bamboo pipes, their ensuing intoxication being watched with huge merriment by men and women alike. The shouts raised by the revellers became more and more shaky, less and less articulate; over and over again the groups around the jars broke up, while their members crawled away, to lie about in deathlike stupors, from which they aroused themselves only to vomit and drink anew.

Long after this stage of the proceedings had been reached, O'Hara had recovered his senses;

but prudence bade him lie as still as a mouse. Once or twice a drunken Murut lurched to his feet and made a pass or two at him, and now and again he was prodded painfully; but putting forth all the self-control at his command, he gave no sign of life. At last every Murut in the place was sunken in abominable torpor, excepting only the chief, from whose knife-scabbard hung the tuft of hair which had once ornamented the chin of the explorer. His little red eyes were fixed in a drunken stare upon O'Hara, and the latter watched them with a fascination of dread through his half-closed lids. Over and over again the Murut crawled to the nearest liquor-jar, and sucked up the dregs with a horrible sibilant gurgling; and at times he even staggered to his feet, muttering and mumbling over his tiny, bushy chin, waving his weapon uncertainly, ere he subsided in a limp heap upon the floor. On each occasion he gave more evident signs of drowsiness and at last his blinking eyes were covered by their lashless lids.

At the same moment a gentle gnawing sound, which had been attracting O'Hara's attention for some minutes, though he had not dared to move by so much as a finger's breadth to discover its cause, ceased abruptly. Then the faintest ghost of a whisper came to his ears from below his cage, and, moving with the greatest caution, and peering down through the uncertain light, he saw that a hole had been made by sawing away two of the laths which formed the flooring. In the black hole immediately beneath him the faces of two of his own Dyaks

were framed, and even as he looked one of them hoisted himself into the hut, and began deftly to remove the bars of the cage, working as noiselessly as a shadow. The whole thing was done so silently, and O'Hara's own mind was so racked by the emotions which his recent experiences had held for him, that he was at first persuaded that what he saw, or rather fancied he saw, was merely a figment conjured up for his torture by the delirium which possessed him. He felt that if he suffered himself to believe in this mocking delusion even for an instant, the disappointment of discovering its utter unreality would drive him mad. He was already spent with misery, physical and mental; he was constantly holding himself in leash to prevent the commission of some insane extravagance; he was seized with an unreasoning desire to scream. He fought with himself —a self that was unfamiliar to him, although its identity was never in doubt—as he might have fought with a stranger. He told himself that his senses were playing cruel pranks upon him, and that nothing should induce him to be deceived by them; and all the while—hope —mad, wild hysterical hope—was surging up in his heart, shaking him like an aspen, wringing unaccustomed tears from his eyes, and tearing his breast with noiseless sobs.

As he lay inert and utterly wretched, unable to bear up manfully under this new wanton torture of the mind, the ghost of the second Dyak clambered skilfully out of the darkness below the hut, and joined his fellow, who had already made a wide gap in the side of the

cage. Then the two of them seized O'Hara, and with the same strange absence of sound lifted him bodily through the prison and through the hole in the flooring on to the earth below. Their grip upon his lacerated flesh hurt him acutely; but the very pain was welcome, for did it not prove the reality of his deliverers? What he experienced of relief and gratitude O'Hara could never tell us, for all he remembers is that, gone suddenly weak and plaintive as a child, he clung to the little Dyaks, sobbing broken-heartedly, and weeping on their shoulders without restraint or decency, in utter *abandon* of self-pity. Also he recalls dimly that centuries later he found himself standing in Bateman's camp, with his people gathering about him, and that of a sudden he was aware that he was mother-naked. After that, so he avers, all is a blank.

The closing incidents of the story were related to me by Bateman one evening when I chanced to foregather with him in an up-country outpost in Borneo. We had been talking far into the night, and our *solitude à deux* and the lateness of the hour combined to thaw his usual taciturnity and to unlock his shy confidence. Therefore I was put in possession of a secret which until then, I believe, had been closely kept.

"It was an awful night," he said, "that upon which poor O'Hara was missing. The Dyaks had gone out in couples all over the place to try to pick up his trail, but I remained in the camp; for though there was a little moon, it was too dark for a white man's eyes to be of

any good. What with the inactivity, and my fears for O'Hara, I was as 'jumpy' as you make 'em; and as the Dyaks began to drop in, two at a time, each couple bringing in their tale of failure, I worked myself up to such a state of depression and misery that I thought I must be going mad. Just about three o'clock in the morning the last brace of Dyaks turned up, and I was all of a shake when I saw that they had poor O'Hara with them. He broke loose from them and stumbled into the center of the camp stark naked, and pecked almost to bits by those infernal Murut knives; but the wounds were not overdeep, and the blood was caking over most of them. He was an awful sight, and I was for tending his hurts without delay; but he pushed me roughly aside, and I saw that his eyes were blazing with madness. He stood there in the midst of us all, throwing his arms above his head, cursing in English and in the vernacular, and gesticulating wildly. The Dyaks edged away from him, and I could see that his condition funked them mortally. I tried again and again to speak to him and calm him, but he would not listen to a word I said, and for full five minutes he stood there raving and ranting, now and again pacing frenziedly from side to side, pouring out a torrent of invective mixed with muddled orders. One of the Dyaks brought him a pair of trousers, and after looking at them as though he had never seen such things before, he put them on, and stood for a second or two staring wildly around him. Then he made a bee-line for a rifle, loaded it, and slung a bandolier

across his naked shoulders; and before I could stay him he was marching out of the camp with the whole crowd of Dyaks at his heels.

"I could only follow. I had no fancy for being left alone in that wilderness, more especially just then, and one of the Dyaks told me that he was leading them back to the Murut village. You see I only speak Malay. and as O'Hara had been talking Dyak I had not been able to follow his ravings. Whatever lingo he jabbered, however, it was as plain as a pikestaff that the fellow was mad as a hatter; but I had to stop explaining this to him, for he threatened to shoot me, and the Dyaks would not listen. They clearly thought he was possessed by a devil, and they would have gone to hell at his bidding while their fear of him was upon them.

"And this madness made him cunning too, for he stalked the Murut den wonderfully neatly, and just as the dawn was breaking we found ourselves posted in the jungle within a few yards of the two doors, which were the only means of entrance or exit for the poor devils in the hut.

"Then O'Hara leaped out of his hiding place and began yelling like the maniac he was; and in an instant the whole of that long hut was humming like a disturbed beehive. Three or four squalid creatures showed themselves at the doorway nearest O'Hara, and he greeted them with half the contents of his magazine, and shrieked with laughter as they toppled on the ground, rolling over in their death-agony. There was such a wailing and crying set up by

the other inhabitants of the hut as you never heard in all your life—it was just despair made vocal—the sort of outcry that a huge menagerie of wild animals might make when they saw flames lapping at their cages; and above it all I could hear O'Hara's demoniac laughter ringing with savage delight, and the war-whoops of those little devils of Dyaks, whose blood was fairly up now. The trapped wretches in the hut made a stampede for the farther door; we could hear them scuffling and fighting with one another for the foremost places. They thought that safety lay in that direction; but the Dyaks were ready for them, and the bullets from their Winchesters drove clean through three or four of the squirming creatures at a time, and in a moment that doorway, too, and the ground about the ladder foot were a shambles.

"After that for a space there was a kind of awful lull within the hut, though without O'Hara and his Dyaks capered and yelled. Then the noise which our folk were making was drowned by a series of the most heart-breaking shrieks you ever heard or dreamed of, and immediately a second rush was made simultaneously at each door. The early morning light was getting stronger now, and I remember noting how incongruously peaceful and serene it seemed. Part of the hut near our end had caught fire somehow, and there was a lot of smoke, which hung low about the doorway. Through this I saw the crowd of Muruts struggle in that final rush, and my blood went cold when I understood what they were doing. Every

man had a woman or a child held tightly in his arms—held in front of him as a buckler—and it was from these poor devils that those awful screams were coming. I jumped in front of the Dyaks and yelled to them in Malay to hold their fire; but O'Hara thrust me aside, and *shooed* the Dyaks on with shouts and curses and peals of laughter, slapping his palm on his gunstock, and capering with delight and excitement. The Dyaks took no sort of heed of me, and the volleys met the Muruts like a wall of lead.

"I had slipped and fallen when O'Hara pushed me, and as I clambered to my feet again I saw the mob of savages fall together and crumple up, for all the world as paper crumples when burned suddenly. Most of them fell back into the dark interior of the hut, writhing in convulsions above the litter of the dead; but one or two pitched forward headlong to the ground, and I saw a little brown baby, which had escaped unharmed, crawling about over the corpses, and squeaking like a wounded rabbit. I ran forward to save it, but a Dyak was too quick for me, and before I could get near it, he had thrown himself upon it, and . . . *ugh!*

"The Muruts began cutting their way through the flooring then, and trying to bolt into the jungle. One or two of them got away, I think; and this threw O'Hara into such a passion of fury that I half expected to see him kill some of the Dyaks. He tore around to the side of the hut, and I saw him brain one Murut as he made a rush from under the low floor. One

end of the building was in roaring flames by this time, and half a dozen Dyaks had gone in at the other end and were bolting the wretched creatures from their hiding places, just as ferrets bolt rabbits from their burrows, while O'Hara and the other Dyaks waited for them outside. They hardly missed one of them, sparing neither age nor sex, though I ran from one to another like a madman, trying to prevent them. It was awful . . . awful! and I was fairly blubbering with the horror of it, and with the consciousness of my own impotence. I was regularly broken up by it, and I remember, at the last, sitting down upon a log, burying my face in my hands, and crying like a child.

"The thing seemed to be over by then: there was no more bolting, and the Dyaks were beginning to clear out of the hut as the flames gained ground and made the place too hot for them. But, at the last, there came a terrific yell from the very heart of the fire, and a single Murut leaped out of the smoke. He was stark naked, for his loin clout had been burned to tinder; he was blackened by the smoke, and his long hair was afire behind him! His mouth was wide, and the cries that came from it went through and through my head, running up and up the scale till they hit upon a note the shrillness of which agonized me. Surrounded by the flames, he looked like a devil in the heart of the pit. In one scorched arm he brandished a long knife, the blade of which was red with the glare of the flames, and in the other was the sheath, blazing at one end, and decked at the

other end by a great tuft of yellow hair that was smoldering damply.

"As soon as he saw him O'Hara raised a terrible cry and threw himself at him. The two men grappled and fell, the knife and scabbard escaping from the Murut's grasp and pitching straight into the fire. The struggle lasted for nearly a minute, O'Hara and his enemy rolling over and over one another, breathing heavily but making no other sound. Then something happened—I don't clearly know what; but the Murut's head dropped, and O'Hara rose up from his dead body, moving very stiffly. He stood for a moment so, looking round him in a dazed fashion, until his eyes caught mine. Then he staggered toward me, reeling like a tipsy man.

"'Mother of heaven!' he said thickly, 'what *have* I done?'

"He stared round him at the little brown corpses, doubled up in dislocated and distorted attitudes, and his eyes were troubled.

"'God forgive me!' he muttered. 'God forgive me!'

"Then he spun about on his heel, his hands outstretched above his head, his fingers clutching at the air, a thin foam forming on his lips, and before I could reach him he had toppled over in a limp heap upon the ground.

"I had an awful business getting O'Hara down-country. He was mad as a March hare for three weeks. But the Dyaks worked like bricks—though I could not bear the sight of them—and the currents of the rivers were in our favor when we reached navigable water. I

know that O'Hara was mad that morning—no white man could have acted as he did unless he had been insane—and he always swears that he has no recollection of anything that occurred after the Dyaks rescued him. I hope it may be so, but I am not certain. He is a changed man anyway, as nervous and jumpy as they make 'em, and I know that he is always brooding over that up-country trip of ours."

"Yes," I assented, "and he is constantly telling the first part of the story to every chance soul he meets."

"Exactly," said Bateman. "That is what makes me sometimes doubt the completeness of his oblivion concerning what followed. What do *you* think?"

LEGEND OF COUNT JULIAN AND HIS FAMILY

WASHINGTON IRVING

Many and various are the accounts given in ancient chronicles of the fortunes of Count Julian and his family, and many are the traditions on the subject still extant among the populace of Spain, and perpetuated in those countless ballads sung by peasants and muleteers, which spread a singular charm over the whole of this romantic land.

He who has traveled in Spain in the true way in which the country ought to be traveled, —sojourning in its remote provinces, rambling among the rugged defiles and secluded valleys of its mountains, and making himself familiar with the people in their out-of-the-way hamlets and rarely visited neighborhoods,—will remember many a group of travelers and muleteers,

gathered of an evening around the door or the spacious hearth of a mountain venta, wrapped in their brown cloaks, and listening with grave and profound attention to the long historic ballad of some rustic troubadour, either recited with the true *ore rotundo* and modulated cadences of Spanish elocution, or chanted to the tinkling of a guitar. In this way he may have heard the doleful end of Count Julian and his family recounted in traditionary rhymes, that have been handed down from generation to generation. The particulars, however, of the following wild legends are chiefly gathered from the writings of the pseudo Moor Rasis; how far they may be safely taken as historic facts it is impossible now to ascertain; we must content ourselves, therefore, with their answering to the exactions of poetic justice.

. . . Everything had prospered with Count Julian. He had gratified his vengeance; he had been successful in his treason, and had acquired countless riches from the ruin of his country. But it is not outward success that constitutes prosperity. The tree flourishes with fruit and foliage while blasted and withering at the heart. Wherever he went, Count Julian read hatred in every eye. The Christians cursed him as the cause of all their woe: the Moslems despised and distrusted him as a traitor. Men whispered together as he approached, and then turned away in scorn; and mothers snatched away their children with horror if he offered to caress them. He withered under the execration of his fellow-men, and last, and worst of all, he began to loathe him-

self. He tried in vain to persuade himself that he had but taken a justifiable vengeance; he felt that no personal wrong can justify the crime of treason to one's country.

For a time he sought in luxurious indulgence to soothe or forget the miseries of the mind. He assembled round him every pleasure and gratification that boundless wealth could purchase, but all in vain. He had no relish for the dainties of his board; music had no charm wherewith to lull his soul, and remorse drove slumber from his pillow. He sent to Ceuta for his wife Frandina, his daughter Florinda, and his youthful son Alarbot; hoping in the bosom of his family to find that sympathy and kindness which he could no longer meet with in the world. Their presence, however, brought him no alleviation. Florinda, the daughter of his heart, for whose sake he had undertaken this signal vengeance, was sinking a victim to its effects. Wherever she went, she found herself a byword of shame and reproach. The outrage she had suffered was imputed to her as wantonness, and her calamity was magnified into a crime. The Christians never mentioned her name without a curse, and the Moslems, the gainers by her misfortune, spake of her only by the appellation of Cava, the vilest epithet they could apply to a woman.

But the opprobrium of the world was nothing to the upbraiding of her own heart. She charged herself with all the miseries of these disastrous wars,—the deaths of so many gallant cavaliers, the conquest and perdition of her country. The anguish of her mind preyed upon

the beauty of her person. Her eye, once soft and tender in its expression, became wild and haggard; her cheek lost its bloom, and became hollow and pallid, and at times there was desperation in her words. When her father sought to embrace her she withdrew with shuddering from his arms, for she thought of his treason and the ruin it had brought upon Spain. Her wretchedness increased after her return to her native country, until it rose to a degree of frenzy. One day when she was walking with her parents in the garden of their palace, she entered a tower, and, having barred the door, ascended to the battlements. From thence she called to them in piercing accents, expressive of her insupportable anguish and desperate determination. "Let this city," said she, "be henceforth called Malacca, in memorial of the most wretched of women, who therein put an end to her days." So saying, she threw herself headlong from the tower and was dashed to pieces. The city, adds the ancient chronicler, received the name thus given it, though afterwards softened to Malaga, which it still retains in memory of the tragical end of Florinda.

The Countess Frandina abandoned this scene of woe, and returned to Ceuta, accompanied by her infant son. She took with her the remains of her unfortunate daughter, and gave them honorable sepulture in a mausoleum of the chapel belonging to the citadel. Count Julian departed for Carthagena, where he remained plunged in horror at this doleful event.

About this time, the cruel Suleiman, having

destroyed the family of Muza, had sent an Arab general, named Alahor, to succeed Abdalasis as emir or governor of Spain. The new emir was of a cruel and suspicious nature and commenced his sway with a stern severity that soon made those under his command look back with regret to the easy rule of Abdalasis. He regarded with an eye of distrust the renegado Christians who had aided in the conquest, and who bore arms in the service of the Moslems; but his deepest suspicions fell upon Count Julian. "He has been a traitor to his own countrymen," said he; "how can we be sure that he will not prove traitor to us?"

A sudden insurrection of the Christians who had taken refuge in the Austrian Mountains quickened his suspicions, and inspired him with fears of some dangerous conspiracy against his power. In the height of his anxiety, he bethought him of an Arabian sage named Yuza, who had accompanied him from Africa. This son of science was withered in form, and looked as if he had outlived the usual term of mortal life. In the course of his studies and travels in the East, he had collected the knowledge and experience of ages; being skilled in astrology, and, it is said, in necromancy, and possessing the marvelous gift of prophecy or divination. To this expounder of mysteries Alahor applied to learn whether any secret treason menaced his safety.

The astrologer listened with deep attention and overwhelming brow to all the surmises and suspicions of the emir, then shut himself up to consult his books and commune with

those supernatural intelligences subservient to his wisdom. At an appointed hour the emir sought him in his cell. It was filled with the smoke of perfumes; squares and circles and various diagrams were described upon the floor, and the astrologer was poring over a scroll of parchment, covered with cabalistic characters. He received Alahor with a gloomy and sinister aspect; pretending to have discovered fearful portents in the heavens, and to have had strange dreams and mystic visions.

"O emir," said he, "be on your guard; treason is around you and in your path; your life is in peril. Beware of Count Julian and his family."

"Enough," said the emir. "They shall all die! Parents and children,—all shall die!"

He forthwith sent a summons to Count Julian to attend him in Cordova. The messenger found him plunged in affliction for the recent death of his daughter. The count excused himself, on account of this misfortune, from obeying the commands of the emir in person, but sent several of his adherents. His hesitation, and the circumstance of his having sent his family across the straits to Africa, were construed by the jealous mind of the emir into proof of guilt. He no longer doubted his being concerned in the recent insurrections, and that he had sent his family away, preparatory to an attempt, by force of arms, to subvert the Moslem domination. In his fury he put to death Siseburto and Evan, the nephews of Bishop Oppas and sons of the former king, Witiza, suspecting them of taking part in the treason.

Thus did they expiate their treachery to their country in the fatal battle of the Guadalete.

Alahor next hastened to Carthagena to seize upon Count Julian. So rapid were his movements that the count had barely time to escape with fifteen cavaliers, with whom he took refuge in the strong castle of Marcuello, among the mountains of Aragon. The emir, enraged to be disappointed of his prey, embarked at Carthagena and crossed the straits to Ceuta, to make captives of the Countess Frandina and her son.

The old chronicle from which we take this part of our legend presents a gloomy picture of the countess in the stern fortress to which she had fled for refuge,—a picture heightened by supernatural horrors. These latter the sagacious reader will admit or reject according to the measure of his faith and judgment; always remembering that in dark and eventful times, like those in question, involving the destinies of nations, the downfall of kingdoms, and the crimes of rulers and mighty men, the hand of fate is sometimes strangely visible, and confounds the wisdom of the worldly wise, by intimations and portents above the ordinary course of things. With this proviso, we make no scruple to follow the venerable chronicler in his narration.

Now it so happened that the Countess Frandina was seated late at night in her chamber in the citadel of Ceuta, which stands on a lofty rock, overlooking the sea. She was revolving in gloomy thought the late disasters of her family, when she heard a mournful noise

like that of the sea-breeze moaning about the castle walls. Raising her eyes, she beheld her brother, the Bishop Oppas, at the entrance of the chamber. She advanced to embrace him, but he forbade her with a motion of his hand, and she observed that he was ghastly pale, and that his eyes glared as with lambent flames.

"Touch me not, sister," said he, with a mournful voice, "lest thou be consumed by the fire which rages within me. Guard well thy son, for bloodhounds are upon his track. His innocence might have secured him the protection of Heaven, but our crimes have involved him in our common ruin." He ceased to speak and was no longer to be seen. His coming and going were alike without noise, and the door of the chamber remained fast bolted.

On the following morning a messenger arrived with tidings that the Bishop Oppas had been made prisoner in battle by the insurgent Christians of the Asturias, and had died in fetters in a tower of the mountain. The same messenger brought word that the Emir Alahor had put to death several of the friends of Count Julian; had obliged him to fly for his life to a castle in Aragon, and was embarking with a formidable force for Ceuta.

The Countess Frandina, as has already been shown, was of courageous heart, and danger made her desperate. There were fifty Moorish soldiers in the garrison; she feared that they would prove treacherous, and take part with their countrymen. Summoning her officers, therefore, she informed them of their danger,

and commanded them to put those Moors to death. Thirty-five of the Moors were in the great square, unsuspicious of any danger, when they were severally singled out by their executioners, and, at a concerted signal, killed on the spot. The remaining fifteen took refuge in a tower. They saw the armada of the emir at a distance, and hoped to be able to hold out until its arrival. The soldiers of the countess saw it also, and made extraordinary efforts to destroy these internal enemies before they should be attacked from without. They made repeated attempts to storm the tower, but were as often repulsed with severe loss. They then undermined it, supporting its foundations by stanchions of wood. To these they set fire and withdrew to a distance, keeping up a constant shower of missles to prevent the Moors from sallying forth to extinguish the flames. The stanchions were rapidly consumed, and when they gave way the tower fell to the ground. Some of the Moors were crushed among the ruins; others were flung to a distance and dashed among the rocks; those who survived were instantly put to the sword.

The fleet of the emir arrived at Ceuta about the hour of vespers. He landed, but found the gates closed against him. The countess herself spoke to him from a tower, and set him at defiance. The emir immediately laid siege to the city. He consulted the astrologer Yuza, who told him that for seven days his star would have the ascendant over that of the youth Alarbot, but after that time the youth

would be safe from his power, and would effect his ruin.

Alahor immediately ordered the city to be assailed on every side, and at length carried it by storm. The countess took refuge with her forces in the citadel, and made desperate defense; but the walls were sapped and mined, and she saw that all resistance would soon be unavailing. Her only thoughts now were to conceal her child. "Surely," said she, "they will not think of seeking him among the dead." She led him therefore into the dark and dismal chapel. "Thou art not afraid to be alone in this darkness, my child?" said she.

"No, mother," replied the boy; "darkness gives silence and sleep." She conducted him to the tomb of Florinda. "Fearest thou the dead, my child?" "No mother; the dead can do no harm, and what should I fear from my sister?"

The countess opened the sepulchre. "Listen, my son," said she. "There are fierce and cruel people who have come hither to murder thee. Stay here in company with thy sister, and be quiet as thou dost value thy life!" The boy, who was of a courageous nature, did as he was bidden, and remained there all that day, and all the night, and the next day until the third hour.

In the meantime the walls of the citadel were sapped, the troops of the emir poured in at the breach, and a great part of the garrison was put to the sword. The countess was taken prisoner and brought before the emir. She appeared in his presence with a haughty demeanor, as if she had been a queen receiving

homage; but when he demanded her son, she faltered and turned pale, and replied, "My son is with the dead."

"Countess," said the emir, "I am not to be deceived; tell me where you have concealed the boy, or tortures shall wring from you the secret."

"Emir," replied the countess, "may the greatest torments be my portion, both here and hereafter, if what I speak be not the truth. My darling child lies buried with the dead."

The emir was confounded by the solemnity of her words; but the withered astrologer Yuza, who stood by his side regarding the countess from beneath his bushed eyebrows, perceived trouble in her countenance and equivocation in her words. "Leave this matter to me," whispered he to Alahor; "I will produce the child."

He ordered strict search to be made by the soldiery and he obliged the countess to be always present. When they came to the chapel, her cheek turned pale and her lip quivered. "This," said the subtle astrologer, "is the place of concealment!"

The search throughout the chapel, however, was equally vain, and the soldiers were about to depart when Yuza remarked a slight gleam of joy in the eye of the countess. "We are leaving our prey behind," thought he; "the countess is exulting."

He now called to mind the words of her asseveration, that her child was with the dead. Turning suddenly to the soldiers he ordered them to search the sepulchres. "If you find him not," said he, "drag forth the bones of that

wanton Cava, that they may be burnt, and the ashes scattered to the winds."

The soldiers searched among the tombs and found that of Florinda partly open. Within lay the boy in the sound sleep of childhood, and one of the soldiers took him gently in his arms to bear him to the emir.

When the countess beheld that her child was discovered, she rushed into the presence of Alahor, and, forgetting all her pride, threw herself upon her knees before him.

"Mercy! mercy!" cried she in piercing accents, "mercy on my son—my only child! O Emir! listen to a mother's prayer and my lips shall kiss thy feet. As thou art merciful to him so may the most high God have mercy upon thee, and heap blessings on thy head."

"Bear that frantic woman hence," said the emir, "but guard her well."

The countess was dragged away by the soldiery, without regard to her struggles and her cries, and confined in a dungeon of the citadel.

The child was now brought to the emir. He had been awakened by the tumult, but gazed fearlessly on the stern countenances of the soldiers. Had the heart of the emir been capable of pity, it would have been touched by the tender youth and innocent beauty of the child; but his heart was as the nether millstone, and he was bent upon the destruction of the whole family of Julian. Calling to him the astrologer, he gave the child into his charge with a secret command. The withered son of the desert took the boy by the hand and led him up the winding staircase of a tower. When they reached

the summit, Yuza placed him on the battlements.

"Cling not to me, my child," said he; "there is no danger."

"Father, I fear not," said the undaunted boy; "yet it is a wondrous height!"

The child looked around with delighted eyes. The breeze blew his curling locks from about his face, and his cheek glowed at the boundless prospect; for the tower was reared upon that lofty promontory on which Hercules founded one of his pillars. The surges of the sea were heard far below, beating upon the rocks, the sea-gull screamed and wheeled about the foundations of the tower, and the sails of lofty caraccas were as mere specks on the bosom of the deep.

"Dost thou know yonder land beyond the blue water?" said Yuza.

"It is Spain," replied the boy; "it is the land of my father and mother."

"Then stretch forth thy hands and bless it, my child," said the astrologer.

The boy let go his hold of the wall; and, as he stretched forth his hands, the aged son of Ishmael, exerting all the strength of his withered limbs, suddenly pushed him over the battlements. He fell headlong from the top of that tall tower, and there was not a bone in his tender frame but was crushed upon the rocks beneath.

Alahor came to the foot of the winding stairs.

"Is the boy safe?" cried he.

"He is safe," replied Yuza; "come and behold the truth with thine own eyes."

The emir ascended the tower and looked over the battlements, and beheld the body of the child, a shapeless mass on the rocks far below, and the sea-gulls hovering about it; and he gave orders that it should be thrown into the sea, which was done.

On the following morning the countess was led forth from her dungeon into the public square. She knew of the death of her child, and that her own death was at hand, but she neither wept nor supplicated. Her hair was dishevelled, her eyes were haggard with watching, and her cheek was as the monumental stone; but there were the remains of commanding beauty in her countenance, and the majesty of her presence awed even the rabble into respect.

A multitude of Christian prisoners were then brought forth, and Alahor cried out: "Behold the wife of Count Julian! behold one of that traitorous family which has brought ruin upon yourselves and upon your country!" And he ordered that they should stone her to death. But the Christians drew back with horror from the deed, and said, "In the hand of God is vengeance; let not her blood be upon our heads." Upon this the emir swore with horrid imprecations that whoever of the captives refused should himself be stoned to death. So the cruel order was executed, and the Countess Frandina perished by the hands of her countrymen. Having thus accomplished his barbarous errand, the emir embarked for Spain, and ordered the citadel of Ceuta to be set on fire, and crossed the straits at night by the light of its towering flames.

The death of Count Julian, which took place not long after, closed the tragic story of his family. How he died remains involved in doubt. Some assert that the cruel Alahor pursued him to his retreat among the mountains, and, having taken him prisoner, beheaded him; others that the Moors confined him in a dungeon, and put an end to his life with lingering torments; while others affirm that the tower of the castle of Marcuello, near Huesca, in Aragon, in which he took refuge, fell on him and crushed him to pieces. All agree that his latter end was miserable in the extreme and his death violent. The curse of Heaven, which had thus pursued him to the grave, was extended to the very place which had given him shelter; for we are told that the castle is no longer inhabited on account of the strange and horrible noises that are heard in it; and that visions of armed men are seen above it in the air; which are supposed to be the troubled spirits of the apostate Christians who favored the cause of the traitor.

In after-times a stone sepulchre was shown, outside of the chapel of the castle, as the tomb of Count Julian; but the traveler and the pilgrim avoided it, or bestowed upon it a malediction; and the name of Julian has remained a byword and a scorn in the land for the warning of all generations. Such ever be the lot of him who betrays his country.

THE INLET OF PEACH BLOSSOMS

NATHAN PARKER WILLIS

The Emperor Yuentsoong, of the dynasty Chow, was the most magnificent of the long-descended succession of Chinese sovereigns.

. . . . . .

By the side of a lake in a distant province of the empire, stood one of the imperial palaces of pleasure, seldom visited, and almost in ruins. Hither in one of his moody periods of repose from war, came the conqueror Yuentsoong, for the first time in years separated from his faithful brother prince, Szema. In disguise, and with only one or two attendants, he established himself in the long, silent halls of his ancestor Tsinchemong, and with his boat upon the lake and his spear in the forest, seemed to find all the amusement of which his melancholy was susceptible. On a certain day in the latter part of April, the emperor had set his sail to a fragrant south wind, and reclining on the cushions of his bark, watched the shore as it softly and silently glided past, and the lake being entirely encircled by the imperial forest, he felt immersed in what he believed to be the solitude of a deserted paradise. After skirting the fringed sheet of water in this manner for several hours, he suddenly observed that he had shot through a streak of peach-blossoms floating from the shore, and at the same moment he became conscious that his boat was lightly headed off by a current setting outward. Putting up his helm, he returned to the spot, and beneath the drooping branches of some lux-

uriant willows, this early in leaf, he discovered the mouth of an inlet, which, but for the floating blossoms it brought to the lake, would have escaped the notice of the closest observer. The emperor now lowered his sail, unshipped the slender mast, and betook him to the oars, and as the current was gentle, and the inlet wider within the mouth, he sped rapidly on, through what appeared to be but a lovely and luxuriant vale of the forest. Still those blushing betrayers of some flowering spot beyond extended like a rosy clue before him, and with impulse of muscles swelled and indurated in warlike exercise, the swift keel divided the besprent mirror winding temptingly onward, and, for a long hour, the royal oarsman untiringly threaded this sweet vein of the wilderness.

Resting a moment on his oars while the slender bark still kept her way, he turned his head toward what seemed to be an opening in the forest on the left, and in the same instant the boat ran, head on, to the shore, the inlet at this point almost doubling on its course. Beyond, by the humming of bees and the singing of birds, there should be a spot more open than the tangled wilderness he had passed, and disengaging his prow from the alders, he shoved the boat again into the stream, and pulled round a high rock, by which the inlet seemed to have been compelled to curve its channel. The edge of a bright green meadow now stole into the perspective, and still widening with his approach, disclosed a slightly rising terrace clustered with shrubs, and studded here and there with vases; and farther on,

upon the same side of the stream, a skirting edge of peach-trees loaded with the gay blossoms which had guided him hither.

Astonished at the signs of habitation in what was well understood to be a privileged wilderness, Yuentsoong kept his boat in mid-stream, and with his eyes vigilantly on the alert, slowly made headway against the current. A few strokes with his oars, however, traced another curve of the inlet, and brought into view a grove of ancient trees scattered over a gently ascending lawn, beyond which, hidden from the river till now by the projecting shoulder of a mound, lay a small pavilion with gilded pillars, glittering like fairy work in the sun. The emperor fastened his boat to a tree leaning over the water, and with his short spear in his hand, bounded upon the shore, and took his way toward the shining structure, his heart beating with a feeling of interest and wonder altogether new. On a nearer approach, the bases of the pillars seemed decayed by time and the gilding weather-stained and tarnished, but the trellised porticoes on the southern aspect were laden with flowering shrubs, in vases of porcelain, and caged birds sang between the pointed arches, and there were manifest signs of luxurious taste, elegance, and care.

A moment, with an indefinable timidity, the emperor paused before stepping from the green sward upon the marble floor of the pavilion, and in that moment a curtain was withdrawn from the door, and a female, with step suddenly arrested by the sight of the stranger, stood motionless before him. Ravished with

her extraordinary beauty, and awe-struck with the suddenness of the apparition and the novelty of the adventure, the emperor's tongue cleaved to his mouth, and ere he could summon resolution, even for a gesture of courtesy, the fair creature had fled within, and the curtain closed the entrance as before.

Wishing to recover his composure, so strangely troubled, and taking it for granted that some other inmate of the house would soon appear, Yuentsoong turned his steps aside to the grove, and with his head bowed, and his spear in the hollow of his arm, tried to recall more vividly the features of the vision he had seen. He had walked but a few paces, when there came toward him from the upper skirt of the grove a man of unusual stature and erectness, with white hair, unbraided on his shoulders, and every sign of age except infirmity of step and mien. The emperor's habitual dignity had now rallied, and on his first salutation, the countenance of the old man softened, and he quickened his pace to meet and give him welcome.

"You are noble?" he said with confident inquiry.

Yuentsoong colored slightly.

"I am," he replied, "Lew-melin, a prince of the empire."

"And by what accident here?"

Yuentsoong explained the clue of the peach-blossoms, and represented himself as exiled for a time to the deserted palace upon the lakes.

"I have a daughter," said the old man. abruptly, "who has never looked on human face save mine."

"Pardon me!" replied his visitor; "I have thoughtlessly intruded on her sight, and a face more heavenly fair—"

The emperor hesitated but the old man smiled encouragingly.

"It is time," he said, "that I should provide a younger defender for my bright Teh-leen, and Heaven has sent you in the season of peach-blossoms, with provident kindness.* You have frankly revealed to me your name and rank. Before I offer you the hospitality of my roof I must tell you mine. I am Choo-tseen, the outlaw, once of your own rank and the general of the Celestial army."

The emperor started, remembering that this celebrated rebel was the terror of his father's throne.

"You have heard my history," the old man continued. "I had been, before my rebellion, in charge of the imperial palace on the lake. Anticipating an evil day, I secretly prepared this retreat for my family; and when my soldiers deserted me at the battle of Ke-chow, and a price was set upon my head, hither I fled with my women and children; and the last alive is my beautiful Teh-leen. With this brief outline of my life, you are at liberty to leave me as you came, or to enter my house, on the condition that you become the protector of my child."

The emperor eagerly turned toward the pavilion, and with a step as light as his own, the erect and stately outlaw hastened to lift the

*The season of peach-blossoms was the only season of marriage in ancient China.

curtain before him. Leaving his guest for a moment in the outer apartment, he entered into an inner chamber in search of his daughter, whom he brought, panting with fear, and blushing with surprise and delight, to her future lover and protector.

Bewildering was Teh-leen. Her mouth's corners were dimpled, yet pensive. With the delicacy of a pale rose, her complexion put to shame the floating light of day. The natural gloss of her hair resembled the uncertain sheen of calm water, yet without the aid of false unguents. The native intelligence of her mind seemed to have gained strength by retirement, and he who beheld her, thought not of her as human. Of rare beauty, of rarer intellect was Teh-leen, and her heart responded to the poet's lute. . . .

Yuentsoong's nature was passionately devoted and confiding; and like two brothers with one favorite sister, lived together Teh-leen, Szema, a Tartar prince, and the emperor. The Tartar prince, if his heart knew a mistress before the arrival of Teh-leen at the palace, owned afterward no other than her; and fearless of check or suspicion from the noble confidence and generous friendship of Yuentsoong, he seemed to live but for her service, and to have neither energies nor ambitions except for the winning of her smiles. Szema was of greater personal beauty, frank when it did not serve him to be wily, bold in his pleasures, and of manners almost femininely soft and voluptuous. He was renowned as a soldier, and for Teh-leen, he became a poet and master of the lute; and like

all men formed for ensnaring the hearts of women, he seemed to forget himself in the absorbing devotion to his idolatry. His friend, the emperor, was of another mould. Yuentsoong's heart had three chambers—love, friendship, and glory. Teh-leen was but a third in his existence, yet he loved her—the sequel will show how well! In person he was less beautiful than majestic, of large stature, and with a brow and lip naturally stern and lofty. He seldom smiled, even upon Teh-leen, whom he would watch for hours in pensive and absorbed delight; but his smile, when it did awake, broke over his sad countenance like morning. All men loved and honored Yuentsoong, and all men, except only the emperor, looked on Szema with antipathy. To such natures as the former, women give all honor and approbation; but for such as the latter, they reserve their weakness!

Wrapt up in his friend and mistress, and reserved in his intercourse with his counselors, Yuentsoong knew not that, throughout the imperial city, Szema was called the *kieu*, or robber-bird, and his fair Teh-leen was openly charged with dishonor. Going out alone to hunt as was his custom, and having left his signet with Szema, to pass and repass through the private apartments at his pleasure, his horse fell with him unaccountably in the open field. Somewhat superstitious, and remembering that good spirits sometimes "knit the grass," when other obstacles fail to bar our way to danger, the emperor drew rein and returned to his palace. It was an hour after

noon, and having dismissed his attendants at the city gate, he entered by a postern to the imperial garden, and bethought himself of the concealed couch in a cool grotto by a fountain (a favorite retreat, sacred to himself and Teh-leen), where he fancied it would be refreshing to sleep away the sultriness of the remaining hours till evening. Sitting down by the side of the murmuring fount, he bathed his feet, and left his slippers on the lip of the basin so he might be unencumbered in his repose within, and so with unechoing step entered the resounding grotto. Alas! there slumbered the faithless friend with the guilty Teh-leen upon his bosom!

Grief struck through the noble heart of the emperor like a sword in cold blood. With a word he could consign to torture and death the robber of his honor, but there was agony in his bosom deeper than revenge. He turned silently away, recalled his horse and huntsmen, and, outstripping all, plunged on through the forest till night gathered around him.

Yuentsoong had been absent many days from his capitol, and his subjects were murmuring their fears for his safety, when a messenger arrived to the counselors informing them of the appointment of the captive Tartar prince to the government of the province of Szechuen, the second honor of the Celestial empire. A private order accompanied the announcement, commanding the immediate departure of Szema for the scene of his new authority. Inexplicable as was this riddle to the multitude, there were those who read it truly by their knowledge of the magnanimous soul of the emperor; and

among these was the crafty object of his generosity. Losing no time, he set forward with great pomp for Szechuen, and in their joy to see him no more in the palace, the slighted princes of the empire forgave him his unmerited advancement. Yuentsoong returned to his capitol; but to the terror of his counselors and people, his hair was blanched white as the head of an old man! He was pale as well, but he was cheerful beyond his wont, and to Teh-leen untiring in pensive and humble attentions. . . .

Six months from this period the capitol was thrown into a tumult with the intelligence that the province of Szechuen was in rebellion, and Szema at the head of a numerous army on his way to seize the throne of Yuentsoong. This last sting betrayed the serpent even to the forgiving emperor, and tearing the reptile at last from his heart, he entered with the spirit of other times into warlike preparations. The imperial army was in a few days on its march, and at Keo-Yang the opposing forces met and prepared for encounter.

With a dread of the popular feeling toward Teh-leen, Yuentsoong had commanded for her a closed litter, and she was borne after the imperial standard in the center of the army. On the eve before the battle, ere the watch-fires were lit, the emperor came to her tent, set apart from his own, and with the delicate care and gentleness from which he never varied, inquired how her wants were supplied, and bade her, thus early farewell for the night; his custom of passing among his soldiers on the evening previous to an engagement promising to

interfere with what was usually his last duty before retiring to his couch.

Teh-leen on this occasion seemed moved by some irrepressible emotion, and, as he rose to depart, she fell forward upon her face and bathed his feet with her tears. Attributing it to one of those excesses of feeling to which all, but especially hearts ill at ease, are liable, the noble monarch gently raised her, and, with repeated efforts at reassurance, committed her to the hands of her women. His own heart beat far from tranquilly, for, in the excess of his pity for her grief, he had unguardedly called her by one of the sweet names of their early days of love—strange word now upon his lips—and it brought back, spite of memory and truth, happiness that would not be forgotten!

It was past midnight, and the moon was riding high in heaven, when the emperor, returning between the lengthening watch-fires sought out the small lamp, which, suspended like a star above his own tent, guided him back from the irregular mazes of the camp. Paled by the intense radiance of the moonlight, the small globe of alabaster at length became apparent to his weary eye, and with one glance at the peaceful beauty of the heavens, he parted the curtained door beneath it, and stood within. The Chinese historian asserts that a bird, from whose wing Teh-leen had once plucked an arrow, restoring it to liberty and life, in grateful attachment to her destiny, had removed the lamp from the imperial tent and suspended it over hers. The emperor stood beside her couch. Startled at his inadvertent error, he turned to

retire; but the lifted curtain let in a flood of moonlight upon the sleeping features of Teh-leen, and like dew-drops the undried tears glistened in her silken lashes. A lamp burned faintly in the inner apartment of the tent and her attendants slept soundly. His soft heart gave way. Taking up the lamp, he held it over his beautiful mistress, and once more gazed passionately and unrestrainedly on her unparalleled beauty. The past—the early past—was alone before him. He forgave her—there as she slept, unconscious of the throbbing of his injured, but noble heart, so close beside her—he forgave her in the long silent abysses of his soul! Unwilling to wake her from her tranquil slumber, but promising to himself from that hour such sweets of confiding love as had well-nigh been lost to him forever, he imprinted one kiss upon the parted lips of Teh-leen, and sought his couch for slumber.

Ere daybreak the emperor was aroused by one of his attendants with news too important for delay. Szema, the rebel, had been arrested in the imperial camp, disguised, and on his way back to his own forces, and like wildfire, the information had spread among the soldiery, who, in a state of mutinous excitement, were with difficulty restrained from rushing upon the tent of Teh-leen. At the door of his tent, Yuentsoong found messengers from the alarmed princes and officers of the different commands, imploring immediate aid and the imperial presence to allay the excitement, and while the emperor prepared to mount his horse, the guard arrived with the Tartar prince, ignominiously

tied, and bearing marks of rough usage from his indignant captors.

"Loose him!" cried the emperor in a voice of thunder.

The cords were severed, and with a glance whose ferocity expressed no thanks, Szema reared himself up to his fullest height, and looked scornfully around him. Daylight had now broke, and as the group stood upon an eminence in sight of the whole army, shouts began to ascend, and the armed multitude, breaking through all restraint, rolled in toward the center. Attracted by the commotion, Yuentsoong turned to give some orders to those near him, when Szema suddenly sprang upon an officer of the guard, wrenched his drawn sword from his grasp, and in an instant was lost to sight in the tent of Teh-leen. A sharp scream, a second of thought, and forth again rushed the desperate murderer, with his sword flinging drops of blood, and ere a foot stirred in the paralyzed group, the avenging scimitar of Yuentsoong had cleft him to the chin.

A hush, as if the whole army were struck dumb by a bolt from heaven, followed this rapid tragedy. Dropping the polluted sword from his hand, the emperor, with uncertain step, and the pallor of death upon his countenance, entered the fatal tent.

He came no more forth that day. The army was marshalled by the princes, and the rebels were routed with great slaughter; but Yuentsoong never more wielded sword. "He pined to death," says the historian, "with the wane of the same moon that shone upon the forgiveness of Teh-leen."